

NATIONAL EXHIBITION OF ORIGINAL ART WORK IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

—MANORAMA JAJA

On 30th, July 1991, a unique exhibition, —the first National Exhibition of Original Art Work in Children's Books was opened at the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS) Gallery in New Delhi. This important event is a landmark in the history and development of better books for children. The exhibition was inaugurated by Mr. Ram Niwas Mirdha, Chairman, Lalit Kala Akademi and Member of Parliament.

Organized by the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC) and supported by the Delhi Sahitya Kala Parishad, the exhibition displayed 170 items representing the art work of 60 artists from all over the country. The exhibition remained open from 30th July to 3rd August 1991 and was visited by over one thousand visitors. It also attracted the attention of the media and several write-ups appeared in the press. Television also presented a twenty-minutes report on the exhibits.

In 1987, I had an opportunity to visit

the International Children's Book Fair at Bologna (Italy), and saw the exhibition of original art work of children's books from Australia. This was a wonderful way of promoting the work of the artists who dedicate themselves to illustrating children's books. It struck me that we could also collect the original art work in Indian children's books. On my return to India, I slowly began to collect such art work. By the time the next Bologna Book Fair was held in 1988, we already had the work of fifteen artists with us. At Bologna, we managed to get two stalls. In one stall, we displayed the books and in the other stall we displayed the work of fifteen Indian artists. This mini exhibition of the art work by Indian artists was the first display of the original art work in children's books. Encouraged by the appreciation which we received at Bologna, we continued our effort and collected more original art work. By 1989, we had managed to get art work of twenty-seven artists. Most of the exhibits were obtained from the artists and publishers based in Delhi. At the National Seminar on Better Books for Children organized by the AWIC in November 1989, we exhibited our collection (art work of twenty-seven artists) at the India International Centre at New Delhi along with the exhibition of children's books. This effort was highly appreciated by participants from different parts of India and also from other countries. The exhibition created a new awareness about the importance of the art work in children's books and also attracted the attention of the publishers. The National Seminar arranged a special session for interaction with children—the readers of children's books. These children also visited our exhibition and we received very appreciative comments from them.

The International Children's Book Fair organizers at Bologna, invite one country to display the original art work of children's

book illustrators every year. We decided to make an offer to the International Children's Book Fair at Bologna for holding an exhibition of the original art work in Indian children's books. Our offer was accepted and we have been invited to exhibit the original art work at the International Bologna Book Fair in April 1992. Now was the time to begin our preparation. We planned to hold a similar exhibition in New Delhi and gain experience. On behalf of the AWIC, I approached the Delhi Sahitya Kala Parishad which gave us a grant of Rs. 5000/- for holding the exhibition. They also offered to pay for the gallery and to print the invitation cards.

We mailed three hundred letters to children's book publishers all over India. To our dismay, we did not get any response from most of the publishers. We did not lose heart. We collected addresses of children's book artists. Soon I wrote personal letters to all the artists, who responded to our invitation. Some of the letters were pathetic. None of the artists had his/her art work with him/her. Besides, the copyright of all the original art work had been taken by the publishers, whether it was a book or a magazine.

We also learnt that many of the publishers of children's books had not preserved the original art work. And whatever was there, was not in good shape. Besides, except a few most of them did not show any interest to promote the artists.

The illustrators of children's books also were not conscious of their rights.

The date of the exhibition was approaching fast and we did not have enough art work. Well, again we shot off letters to artists saying that we really wished to promote them and they must prepare fresh art work for the exhibition.

The first response came from Madras. The artists working for *Junior Quest*, the

magazine of the *Chandamama* publications, managed to collect their art work and send it to us. We were really delighted to receive their work. Another consignment arrived from Calcutta-based artists. Now our AWIC team started visiting Delhi based publishers. This personal approach proved very fruitful and the National Book Trust, Delhi, gave us art work of 15 artists.

While the collection of work was going on, we organized a slogan competition. Out of 51 slogans received, we selected Indira Ananthakrishnan's slogan.

WORDS AND COLOUR GO TOGETHER

We also prepared a Hindi slogan. Once we had the slogan, Tapas Guha, a well-known artist prepared a beautiful logo on the theme of the exhibition and donated this work to the AWIC.



LOGO

Tamasha, a magazine for children and Rupa and Company a publisher, also sent us work of their artists. Besides, we had art work from our own collection. Amongst this we are proud to have two black and white original illustrations by Satyajit Ray. He had specially made these illustra-

tions, at my request for his story "Bonku Babu's Friend." This story was translated from the original Bengali by the author, which also happens to be the first story ever translated into English by Satyajit Ray. We had covered Satyajit Ray as an author and illustrator for children, in the AWIC Quarterly WRITER AND ILLUSTRATOR in Vol. 2 No. 2 issue in 1982.

Shankar's original illustrations were collected from the Children's Book Trust. These are from his books *Sujata* and the *Wild Elephant* and *Woman's Wit*.

The Children's Book Trust of Delhi was extremely helpful and lent us the original art work of ten artists.

Some illustrators prepared fresh art work specially for this exhibition.

Now, we had the work of 60 artists from different parts of the country. Equipped with some original art work, I went to

near the lift.

I informed Mr. Mirdha the purpose of our visit. As we waited, I began to show him the original art work asking him,

"Is it not a painting?"

"Yes, of course," he replied.

"Then why is this work not been given importance by the Lalit Kala Akademi?"

This question of mine touched Mr. Mirdha. I briefly told him about the exhibition and also requested him to inaugurate this exhibition. He gladly accepted my invitation. Now we had the art work, an eminent person to inaugurate the exhibition and an enthusiastic team of voluntary workers—the members of the Association.

The Sahitya Kala Parishad had already got the invitation cards printed and we promptly mailed the cards to the artists, the publishers and the AWIC members.



*Illustration by Reboti Bhushan from *Lalu Peelu**

meet Mr. R. N. Mirdha. Mild and very pleasant, Mr. Mirdha welcomed me warmly in the foyer of his office. There was a momentary power cut and he was waiting

Mr. Mirdha arrived punctually at 6 o'clock in the evening of 30th July. We welcomed him and led him to the gallery.

The Secretary-General of the AWIC wel-

comed the Chief Guest and the President of the AWIC presented him a set of books written by the members of the AWIC. A brass lamp placed in the centre of a beautiful flower decoration, was lit by the Chief Guest.

Mr. Mirdha spoke appreciatively about the pioneering work of our Association and later examined all the 170 exhibits.

Everyday six members of the Association took care of the gallery. A large number of visitors, including those specially interested in the art work in children's books, visited the gallery.

The exhibition gave us some very pleasant moments. One afternoon, Reboti Bhushan, well-known for his cartoon style of illustrations visited, the exhibition. His original art work was also on display. He was in a jovial mood. We requested him to draw a particular illustration which young children had liked very much from picture book *Lalu Peelu* (Vinita Krishna), he quickly drew the same illustration in cartoon style. Those who were present there had a delightful time with him.

This national exhibition lasted for five days and every moment spent at the gallery was memorable. The AWIC is very happy that it attracted the attention of right thinking people. Some of the visitors wrote appreciative comments in the visitors book.

These are :

— Such exhibitions should be organized again and again. I congratulate everyone, whoever worked for it. —*Rais Mirza*

— The exhibition is really impressive. *Malini*

— Very interesting. A lot of excellent stuff. Congratulations AWIC.

Geeta Dharmarajan
Editor TAMASHA (a Children's magazine)

— A pleasant surprise out of children's books.

Devika Rani
(Indian Express, Chandigarh).

— A unique idea of representation and an enjoyable experience to see.

Meenakshi Dhar

Holy Family Hospital.

— Chosen collection indeed. Impressed very much. Our appreciation to organizers.

M. K. Jain

Shipra and Company Delhi.

— I really enjoyed all illustrations.

B. Roy Chowdhry.

— Most impressive.

Ajay Sham Lal.

— Wonderful.

V. P. Gupta

Pustak Mahal, Delhi.

— Now I can identify the works and know which artist has made them at first look. Great exhibition.

Vishakha

— It has been a pure delight to behold such beautiful illustrations. If it can lift up my spirits, I guess it can do more. Wonderful

— Unbelievable! *Bhavna Bajaj.*

— A new dimension is given to book illustration. *Dr. Vanita Basal.*

— A very creditable venture to promote interest in the art of children's books. The first exhibition itself is a success but now that this has taken place, the next exhibition is bound to be even more impressive. Congratulations.

Anand Sarup

Chairman, National Book Trust.

Names of artists whose works were displayed.

Mr. K. Shankar Pillai, Mr. Satyajit Ray, Mr. Reboti Bhushan, Mr. Bodhraj, Mr. Jagdish Joshi, Mr. Mrinal Mitra, Mr. B. G. Verma, Mr. Mickey Patel, Mr. Pulak Biswas, Mr. Sudhosatva Basu, Mr. Abid Surti, Mr. Subir Roy, Mr. Tapas Guha, Mr. Niren Sengupta, Mr. Ajit Ninan, Mr. Mario Miranda, Mr. Atanu Roy, Mr. D. T. Padekar, Ms. Sigrun Srivastava, Mr. Niranjan

Continued on page 28

Continued from page 4

Ghoshal, Ms. Sudha Chowdhary, Ms. Manjula Padmanabhan, Ms. Mala Marwah, Ms. Neeta Gangopadhyaya, Ms. Sahana Pal, Mr. Soumitro Sarkar, Mr. Bhaskaran, Ms. Viky Arya, Mr. Judhajit Sengupta, Ms. Sujata Singh, Ms. Kitty Jain, Ms. Bindulika Sharma, Mr. Surinder Pal Singh, Mr. V. Shashi, Mr. Mohinder Paul, Ms. Morin, Ms. Bulbul Sharma, Ms. Tapashi Ghoshal, Mr. Ram Wadekar, Ms. Sujasha Das Gupta,

Mr. Amit Srivastava, Ms. Uma Raman, Mr. R. Ganeshan, Ms. Priya Nagarajan, Mr. Vijay Kumari, Ms. Vandana Joshi, Ms. Sudha Ghosh, Mr. Ashok Raja Gopalan, Mr. Ramesh A. Bagchi, Mr. Ranjan Dey, Mr. Badri Narayan, Mr. Pranab Chakraborti, Mr. Madhu Powle, Mr. Debabrata Sarkar, Mr. Yusuf Bangalorewala, Mr. Saradendu Sen Roy, Mr. Amitabha Sengupta, Mr. Deepak Harichanda, Mr. Sanjay Mullick.